Constructs of Critical Communication

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Constructs of Critical Communication

by Aerosol

Summary

"Is this a dream?"

He crosses his arms, wraps his body with an own, physical barrier and it does not warm him. There is not much hope in him, as he says that. A pause occurs. Just a little.

"Quite." one says curtly.

Will laughs. It’s a miserable laugh, one that overburdened people emit when they hear that their perfectly healthy mother died last night in her sleep. But he never had a mother, why should he know how to laugh to this then? He laughs anyway. He laughs, and doesn’t want to.

"I didn’t know I could dream anymore." he murmurs.

The light is a lance of fine woven fire when it stings in the black center of Will’s eyes.

He involuntarily narrows them to slits and bends his head, away from the glaring source, away from the burnt feeling that overgrows his retina like ivy. He doesn't know where he is, just that he is WHERE he is, the brightness hurts him and he wants to avoid the pain. And he freezes. That's all he knows. He freezes pathetically.

Where are we?

The question is not really a question to be true. Especially since he has hunches, especially since he thinks these hunches are partially confirmed when he says **We** instead of *I*. It's a strange experience to know what you don’t want to know but it’s not foreign to him either. The cold stretches more into his cycle, creeps northward to his haired legs, his knees, his thighs. Moisture joins the sensation of freezing. Adhesive extract on his skin and his sparsely chosen clothes. The boxers and the greyish shirt he wore when he went to bed that night. He tastes metal in his breath and the aspiring wet reflects red in the dark like the horizon of evening. He thinks it’s blood, but he doesn’t think it to be his own. Not all of it. He swallows and wants to retch.

At a place no one but us will know. he hears the expected, yet cursed answer, even before the last letter is spoken. The first tentative outbreak of sweat crawls down his neck. He does not look up, keeping his gaze on the picture of his bare feet.

Is this a dream?

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The second voice ripples like a stream in his ear, sharp, cold and caressing at the same time. That's what he always envied him somehow. This presence, with which he ruled the room. The satisfaction in his baritone. The heat of his accent. It's tricky, this heat. It's tricky, this satisfaction. They bring blood and scars. They bring death. And yet, what a delicate death this would likely be.

You didn’t know?

Will licks his lips. His mouth tastes like ash. He blinks. Hannibal is here. Hannibal is somewhere here in the darkness, but he does not see him. Not even the demolition of his

shape and it reinforces the impression that he has no fixed shape any longer. That he has become liquid to him, soft and flying and gaseous so that his lungs collapse if he stays too long in his vicinity. He is inside him, bathing in his blood, being transported from vein to vein and organ to organ like a virus.

I have not dreamed since ... well. it crumbles from his mouth and bitter disappointment overwhelms him as always, the sentence a half bitten bread, a leaden bullet, something he can't complete without shooting a hole into his throat.

He swallows and feels jaggy glass splinters scratch down his windpipe.

Since I stabbed you. adds the deeper voice in the room, although it is not really a room, more like a universe without borders, a big, gigantic, ridiculous nothing.

Will clears his throat, and one of the pieces of glass cuts through a spot under his chin. Skin splits, blood flows, dripping tough and idle on his collarbone.

Yes. he nevertheless says because of everlasting defiance. Or rather the knowledge that he would have choked on this syllable otherwise like on a bale wetted with butyric acid.

He raises a hand and combs through his hair. It's wild and wet, his locks standing on end. He must look funny, like a sad clown who forgot his disguise, being robbed of the colorful garb and his oversized slipper shoes. He must look funny, as lost as he is. But he is not funny. Only rootless.

If this is a dream, then why do I even talk to you? he mutters.

Actually, this question is unnecessary, and hardly adressed to Hannibal, if not more to himself and his confounded, chaotic brain. He would be lying if he was surprised. He would be happy if he did, but he doesn't. That is his curse, a part of it at least. The atmosphere around him vibrates like the inner casing of a coal furnace, particles of air melt, break and mingle without being seen by him as he does not see Hannibal. He just feels him next to him, in front of him, behind him. Over his scalp and under his tongue. He is everywhere he does not wish him to be.

Your mind seems to crave our conversation. And the meeting of our eyes. it whispers to him.

Oh, he knows this enjoying edge at the end. Knows that this is not over between them though he wishes it to be. He sucks a hissing pack of oxygen through his teeth.

No. I don't want it to. I can barely look at myself in the mirror without touching the scar, why should I look at YOU then?

It's true what he says. And it's sad that it's true. Mirrors have never been a friend to him, he evades the vanity far as it goes, and when he shaves the reflective glass is a tool and not an invitation to become intoxicated by his own attractiveness or lech over it. He does not like mirrors. To him, they are often as distorted as the souls of men, especially compared due mutual maintenance of outer facades, soared and spiced up with mascara and nail polish,

cockered through creams and liposuction, through sections and botox and all the other nonsense offered in shops and hospitals and by private physicians. The man hosts a man's ruin and deceit and Will has seen so much deceit in his life, recorded, verified, stored, re-skinned and pitched like a freshly printed book. Even Hannibal was deceptive, is deceptive, **remains** deceptive.

Yet he is real, realer than every other man and woman whom he has ever met and will. He is pure in what he intends to be. He has not chosen this path willingly, it was just there, and it was his own and no one has offered to change it for him. He does not apologize. He assumes, accepts, takes everything he wants. And once he wanted Will, or what Will represented to him at that time. And he got what he wanted, it’s what Will has to deal with now. Maybe later, too. Maybe for his entire life. A lump forms in his throat and his heart feels enclosed by a fist that presses and presses and ...

A presence lingers in his back, but with no intention to attack him from behind. 'True friends always stab you in the front.' And Hannibal has already done this, hasn’t he? He feels a hand, a claw, the shadow of a claw that wanders down to his waist and, like a phantom, sweeps over the place where the scar is waiting. The ugly, toothless, knobby smile that is left of that night as his bad omen. An eternal promise that continues. It won’t stop. Not so fast, not so lightly. A second breath blows itself hot and cold on his neck flexion, against the plump, cream-colored pearl of his earlobe.

Your injury ... yes. I've left my signature on you like people would say.

Will can't escape. He does not even know if he wants to. He is paralyzed. He smells exfoliated patterns of blood in Hannibal's words, drugs and sandalwood, a numbing mix. It does not lull him but won’t let him be as well. There's more to it, the smell of withered roses and flour and olive oil and almond soap and disinfectant and a morbid tenderness ... and Hannibal. Hannibal, as if he’d really be here, really be with him. Will clears his throat. Tries it. It’s difficult. Actually everything seems difficult now.

Feels more like a brand mark. You burned me for everyone else. he replies breathy. And what a shame, he can’t recognize his own voice. The contact is fixed, manifested like stone and leather. Hannibal holds him, touching the scar and the horror it was created by. It hurts as if rats digged a hole in his stomach with their small, pointed teeth. It hurts, and he does not mind.

It's beautiful. he whispers to him and it's almost like a cat’s purr finally putting the paw on her dead prey, ultimately allowed for consumption and to crown and reign as rightful property.

Suddenly Will feels like cattle, one that has been rammed a red-hot horseshoe into its waist. He hates himself. He hates Hannibal. As much as one is able to hate. His cheeks are wet.

It's not! It's - ... Scars are not beautiful. He feels the need to say something and because he does not know what to say otherwise he says just that. Hannibal's fascination is invincible as it seems. Will does not look at him but he suspects the expression is mild on his face. Like the expression of someone who returns after a long journey into an unknown world, coming back where he has begun. And he comes home.

I wished I could touch it. Admire it in all its bloom. it sighs.

It urges Will out of his trance and he shrugs, he jerks, he grabs one last part of common sense and holds it in his hands, trembling, and he has never stopped to tremble since he can remember and since he stole the first bottle from his sleeping father and realized how alcohol tasted. To break away from Hannibal's physical contact is easier than he had feared, and he is taken by surprise, but he maintains his shaky stand as he gradually moves away from him, a small distance only, a little step, a little sold security for the moment. There will be an impact. A downfall. But he does not care, can not. He is so low already, how can it possibly go down further? If Dante had been awaited with the ground of Purgatory after crossing nine realms of hell, then what awaits *him*? He produces a grinding noise when his teeth scrape against each other.

You wouldn't admire the scar but the hand that has carved it into me. So go and admire yourself. Leave me alone! he says and he spits them out, strangles the letters as if they were pebbles. He can't help it. He has to protect where there is no protection.

His heart rumbles between his ribs and for the first time he looks up to see the creature's appearance that the dream has chosen to be his guest tonight. It's a distorted image. Black and sinewy as the deer man with white eyes and yet not the same. It, or *he* has no horns. The antler is gone and left no more than two meaningless stumps and its hooves are fitted with cracks and blood. He finds scratches on long arms and bites on thin legs. The rib cage is visible as ever and yet there is a vertebra squeezing out from the corset like a bad joke, breaking through the film-like skin and stuck as angled remains. The face, the mask of a fiend and mass murderer, is unchanged except for two seams spinning longitudinal on his cheeks, approaching the pinnae in diffuse motifs. The mouth itself is intact, no needle plowed through. Maybe he has simply bitten through the threads that held him, who knows. It is atrocious to see something familiar, though horrible, in such a disfigured image. And as it begins to speak with the essence of Hannibal's baritone, as those lips move to the melody of his words, it sends Will cold shivers up and down his spine.

If you'd really want me to leave I would not be here in the first place, it says. He says. **I-**

- *YOU ALREADY DID!* Will interrupts him. He did not plan to scream, and now it feels like his heart bounces against his teeth.

The sudden rage suprises him most. He takes a deep breath, feeling the air fill his lungs like tar. But the shaking that envelopes his body does not falter. It never does.

You were supposed to leave that night. You were ... I told you to run, but you ...

He does not speak further and his scar is burning. His eyes burn too. The monster that is supposed to be Hannibal looks at him, looking like he internally disintegrates, as if he were an innocent bystander. His eyes are grayish fog, like something would have blinded him recently. Or someone. Then he crouches slowly to his knees as if his calf was pierced by arrows. He sits down, and his lap is hidden by crossed legs. He kinda resembles a monk who wants to meditate. The ... 'thing' sighs. Will recognizes it by the flattening of his starved chest.

I couldn’t go without saying goodbye, could I?

Will snorts.

So what? Your goodbye was killing Abigail and me? How sensitive of you.

Now it's Hannibal who remains silent. It's a game between them, an old back and forth. A ball thrown to each other again and again. Will hates this game. Damns it, but that helps him little. For Hannibal, by God, he does not damn Hannibal. Why should he? Gideon said he was the devil. He was smoke. How should God harm the smoke? What cares the smoke about God? They are both not present in the actual sense. They spray to melt and float to the sky or fall to the ground, no matter what happens to the creatures that reside there, up and down. Disembodied particles, atoms beyond birth and death. But for Will they are alive and strong. They hold him by the throat at night when he winds up. They stare at him from milky white eyeballs when he is in the shower and the water drips like hail on his body. They follow him with memories that are painted with pictures and hands which once touched him. Take him out, day for day, and leave him as hollow shell. No one can relieve him of this, he is obsessed and it’s not even clear whether it would result into mandatory redemption if one took the object of his obsession or the obsession away itself. Perhaps he would still be as empty as before or even more than he already is.

So to hell with God. To hell with the devil. To hell with the smoke.

What would his life be without the illusion of a man who was the only one to give him the feeling of belonging... yes, to be understood? It would be no more than a deferred dying. Like everything in life.

He does not even register that he has moved to the sedentary creature, and how ironic it is that it looks up at him like a dog, too clever for own good. It looks up and waits. When he does, he is only a few steps away from the mutilated Wendigo and his feet are tired, his flesh weighs heavier**.** He's driven by external forces. Finally he sits down in front of Hannibal and instinctively copies his posture, his approach. It's like earlier, somehow, like in in therapy. And Will is aware nevertheless that it will never be like earlier again. The past vanished. The harvest has been brought in and was spoiled.

I don’t know if I'll forgive you. I don’t know if I can. The taste of his lips is bitter as acid. He is so close to him, and yet miles, oceans, perhaps continents away. He blinks. His lids clack like castanets. *A kiss with a fist is all I could offer now.* He tries a sarcastic smile. It's half and ridged and nothing one would be proud of. He does it anyway. What should he do otherwise?

Hannibal stares at him. He does not return the smile. His expression is blank and cold.

I'd lick my blood from your knuckles.

You'd waste no drop.

Nor a drop nor the taste of your skin on my tongue, dear.

Will is not surprised. He is too old and too wounded to be surprised.

Have you thought about consuming me back then, Doctor? Cut and cook my flesh and serve it as fine dish on your plate? he asks, because that's something that honestly interests him since he stayed at the BSHCI. Or maybe a pitiful part of him just yearns to know that he was more for Lecter than a steak walking on two legs. Or a puppet whose strings he pulls. Still.

Hannibal tilts his head, and a scar is visible, like an expensive necklace on the right side of his nape. A reverberation of Abigail, perhaps. Will won't ask.

At the beginning of our aequaintance. goes the reply after a minute of deliberation. **But I knew very soon you'd be worth more than one course.**

Will directs his view to the colorless floor at their feet.

When did you change your mind?

After you shot Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

Will recalls the memory. Blood, sloshing like drizzle on his face. Abigail, desperately gurgling her breath through the cut throat. Abigail ... it had begun there. Everything. Painted in rotten red. When he concentrates, he is able to see the scenery run beside them as if it was on a movie screen. *Y*

You saw potential in me. he says. He sounds hoarse.

I took a glimpse on something valuable. A diamond in need to be shaped. An instrument in demand to be played. I wanted to be the one fulfilling the task. And apparently, I did.

So I was doomed since the first trickle of blood splashed my skin?

We both were.

Typical conclusion. But Will has nothing to oppose.

Why couldn't you stop right theree? he asks. *You should have known how this would end.*

It's not that I couldn't stop. I did not want to. I was curious about this. Curious about you. About us.

Well, curiosity killed the cat. He leans back a little, balancing his weight on his arms, using them like pillars. *You've always been a selfish bastard*, haven't you? *You were bored and I was your ragdoll, your fly stumbling into your net*. he muses, and he is not even angry. No more. That would be a waste of time. A claw sneaks up to him, the intention to touch his cheek, his forehead, his chest where his heart hammers.

Will stiffens and the claw stops. Retreats.

You were many things, but you were mine all along. You were all that mattered to me. it's heard gently, so soft that it leaves the profiler shudder in disgust.

I d on't wanna hear this bullshit anymore.

Y ou don’t deny it though.

He does not reply to that. Abrupt silence circulates between them like a ship on a hilly sea.

I miss you it bursts into the hush and it's exactly what Will cannot bear to hear. Three words, and they kill him. He never thought that words can hurt so much before he met Hannibal.

Don’t say that. that's what he says. It's a bit helpless, yes, but it's the only thing that stumbles out. Hannibal’s dull onyx lips curl downwards.

Why? Would you prefer a lie instead?

Will shakes his head. No, he has had enough of lies. He has had enough of ... he has enough. He squints to his bare feet and notices that they are dirty, dabbed with crumbs of mud and rainy earth. Has this been previously that way? He does not think so. But this is a dream, and in a dream he does not dare to even trust himself with such things.

I’m not sure if I still may differ your lies from your truth. he says.

If that's true, why don’t you look me in the eye then?

The profiler looks up and catches himself promptly in a whirl of gray streaks. He shrugs away a bit, even if it appears that the reaction differs from the rest. It is forced. And Will knows that Hannibal knows it and vice versa.

I look at you. So? It doesn’t change anything. It just hurts.

Now he is the one who's lying. But sometimes a lie is all we have. The ragged version of Hannibal looks at him thoughtfully.

You're afraid to see something you’re not able to hate. You're scared, but you're not a coward, Will. You never were. Will’s mouth digs a slender grave into his skin.

Keep your mouth shut, Hannibal. Please. Hannibal is not affronted.

What do you see in my eyes? Do you see yourself in them?

I said shut up!

The landscape, if you can call it as landscape, varies from gloom to light, and the sun breaks like a comet inti the scene. Everything is bright. And Will wants to go back into the darkness. He wants to hide. That would be easier. But nothing is easy in the construct of his mind. Nothing is easy in the construct of critical conversation and isn’t this exactly what they are doing here? At first, they did not do anything else beside that. Talked. Speculated. Interpreted. Why couldn’t it stay like this?

Will listens to the blood flowing through his veins. It’s quite simple actually. Will is Will. And Hannibal is Hannibal. It had to be, in one way or another way. This is tragic, but unavoidable. Will knows he could have made a different turn in the last quarter, if he had

betrayed Jack and not Lecter. But when he looks at Hannibal, or that what Hannibal has become in his mind, then he knows frankly nothing. He is sad. And tired.

I loved you; yes, I did. I loved you in the most awful ways a man has known. And I'm sorry that I can't take back this love. It only caused us harm. he admits, responding to a question that has never been given permission to exist aloud, but wafts constantly between them. Hannibal raises a hairless, bony brow.

Why should you want to take it back? It was your gift as I gave you mine.

It was my death sentence.

And your rebirth.

Will says no more. He straightens his shoulders.

I will find you. It is a threat. A goal. And a promise. Hannibal rubs a few blackberry-colored welts on the flesh of his legs with his nails.

I know you will. I'd be lying, if I wouldn't look forward to it. I want to see you again, in color and shape. But I hope we can have a decent talk before you point your gun at me.

Will does not understand him. And yet, yes, he understands, soon as he's honest with himself, and that's the worst part of it all. This universal understanding. This intimacy. It's forbidden, it's sick, but he's sick too... he can't remember the time when sickness hasn't knocked on his door.

*Maybe you'll die. Maybe **I'm** going to die. I might be the last thing you'll ever see.* he whispers, his voice breaking at the thought, and he can't help it.

For the first time, Hannibal avoids his gaze.

We could kill each other. I think it would be poetic. We would be a perfect match, equal in every aspect life had to offer us.

Poetic. Of course it would be. Will smiles his splintered smile.

Should I start practicing now? Should I learn what it's like to kill you in my dream, over and over again until I can do it in reality? he teases, although now there is no time to lose in banter. Probably there is no teasing. Probably there is an arrangement of the darkest kind. Hannibal seems to weigh these questions, cataloging every word. Then he gets up, a soundless laugh on his marble face.

This is my dream, Will. Not yours. You will have other opportunities. he explains, and Will should be shocked, he should tear his eyes open and gasp for air. But he doesn't.

Hannibal stands in front of him and now he is the one who looks up, waiting. Their parts have changed... have they ever been cast in the first place? He does not know.

I'm sorry that you thought you'd be in control adds Hannibal and Will takes these words that actually imply an excuse, and yet they don't. No, he knows him too well for that.

I did not. he says. And he grins. It tweaks in his cheeks like a barge pole. His eyes grin not. His eyes are dead.

How could I? ... I just asked if it's a dream after all. Not who owns the dream. A rookie mistake. I'll always disappoint you as you will disappoint me.

Once again, the place changes, their environment becomes blurred to a pulp of nothing and less. The light goes on tour and the darkness collects in the corners of his mind yet again. Even Hannibal melts, is being cut into slices as he had done with Beverly so many months ago. But the discs themselves don't melt, they share a microscopically small rise and hover in the air, similar to smoldering black fluff. Lecter's eyes are on him all the time. They always are. They always were.

See you soon, Will. I'll be waiting for you.

Will does not take his eyes from him. His throat feels like stuffed with wax as he traces the creature's decay till no shred is left. Until he's alone. All alone.

Yes. he replies softly, although there is no one to whom he could owe his words anymore. He coughs and spits out a few drops of blood. The hooked tip of a fishing lure shines in them. He watches as the red dries and the metal rusts.

See you soon.

***

As Hannibal awakes, he is very calm and silent.

It was his own decision to fall out of sleep, so he's not shocked that the dream has its abrupt end. He stares at the ceiling, lying on his back. A sweet breeze blows around him like a lovely stranger, stroking in waves across his chest. Bedelia rests beside him, her smooth body wrapped in the flattering folds of the blanket. Her hair is a waterfall of golden brocade tickling her swanlike neck. She's a beautiful woman. Clever. Strong. A fighter and survivor. She means something to him, he appreciates her very much. But he does not love her, and he does not try to convince this to himself because he knows his mind far too well for that. He grabs the hem of the blanket and places it higher over her shoulder before he gets up and being clothed with nothing but simple pajama trousers, he leaves the bedroom. He is no longer in the mood for sleep, fatigue has left him. He thirsts for fresh air and space to clear his thoughts.

Pleasant calmness greets him when he steps out onto the terrace of the house. Only here and there the sound of motors penetrates his ears. The city in front of him is a sea of lights and

old treasured grace. It's summer in Florence, and the air is still warm from the heat of the previous day. Hannibal catches the aroma of cherries and fertile soil in the passing wind. He lets his forearms rest on the railing, listening to the music of the night. A forgotten smile curves on his dry lips.

Little does he know what the future holds, but there are hunches and truths he will create. Sorrow will happen. Violence. Blood. Murder. And Will. Will will happen. And he looks forward to it all. He could resemble a child, and yet he feels old. He lifts his head and looks up to the pitch-black sky, locating the flashing belt of Orion with ease. Maybe, somewhere in America, Will just sat up in his bed and hides his face in his hands, crying and cursing him. The stars' shimmer reflects silvern and rarely wet in his blood brown eyes.

The hunt begins. Soon.

…

May the best one win.

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